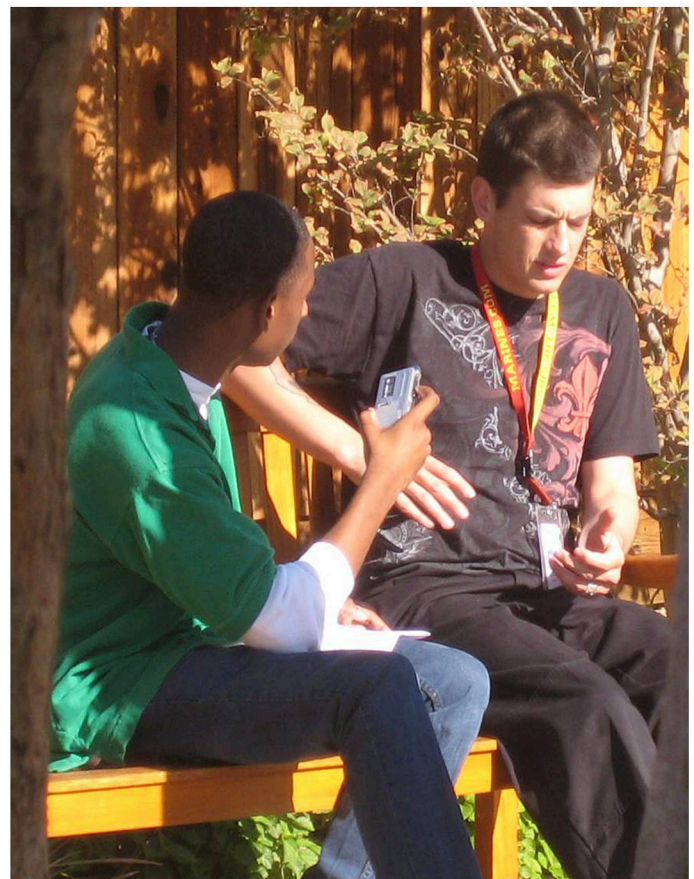
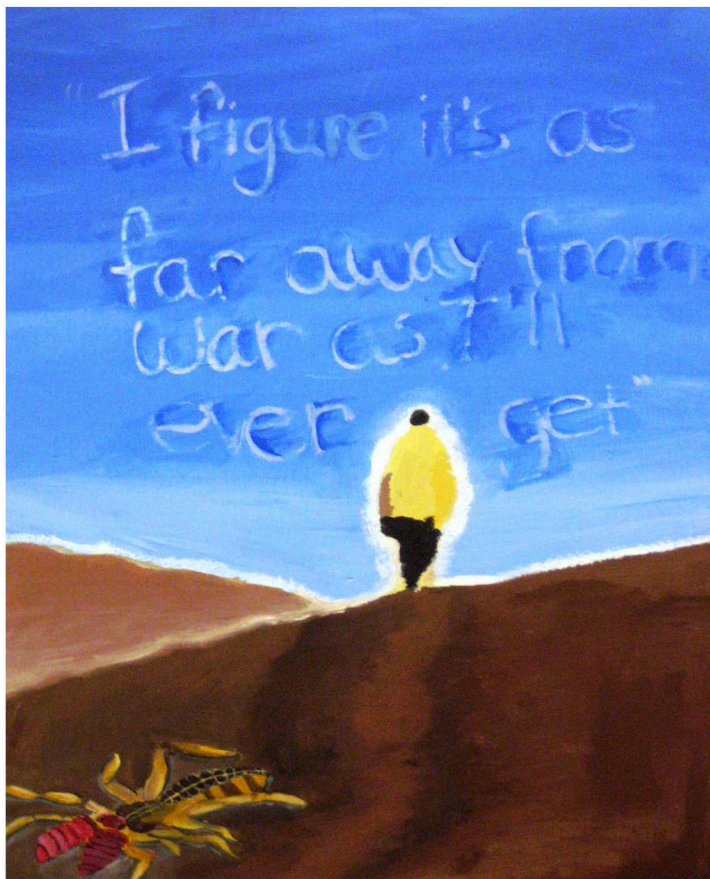
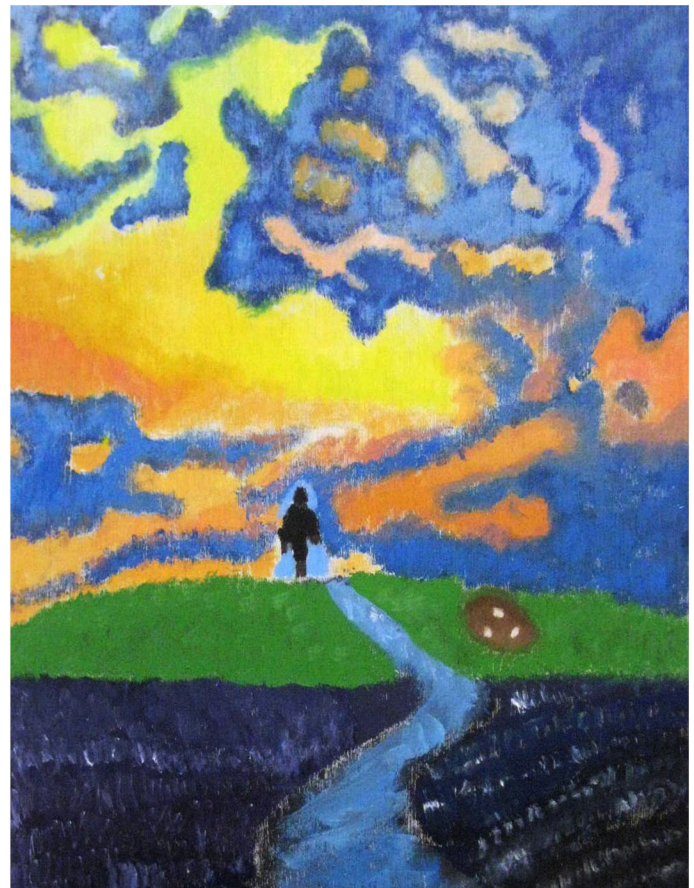


# “Who are our unsung heroes?”

The Voices and Visions project started out as a challenge for seniors to experience what it is like to function as a working artist: “to conceive, communicate, collaborate, and create a product for a specific client and situation.” Jeremy Farson asked his students to contact local organizations, find out if they had artistic or graphic design needs, and make a proposal to donate their services. As their humanities teacher, Stephanie Lytle helped students research local organizations and develop outreach materials, including proposals, artistic resumes, and cover letters.

When they discovered the Veteran’s Village of San Diego (VVSD), the project shifted. San Diego is a community rich with veterans and unfortunately, many of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, or addiction. As Stephanie said, “it became clear that our outreach project could go deep. We knew that there was something very simple that we could do for our San Diego veterans: listen.”

The class made preparations to interview veterans, write about their stories, and co-design a piece of art with them. Meanwhile, they read *Beowulf* in Stephanie’s English class, focusing especially on the “scop,” a singer-storyteller, as an oral historian and preserver of the stories of the era’s heroes. Students examined this role in the current day: “Who do our contemporary scops celebrate? Who should they celebrate? Who are our ‘unsung’ heroes?” Later in the semester, the class read Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, drawing parallels between his characters and the veterans they were interviewing.





# VOICES AND VISIONS

JEREMY FARSON • STEPHANIE LYTLER  
TWELFTH GRADE • ENGLISH • ART  
HIGH TECH HIGH INTERNATIONAL





## LEARNING GOALS

- To experience working with a client to create art
- To develop interviewing skills
- To develop close reading and literary analysis skills
- To see thematic connections between modern events and literature from very different times
- To experience the ability to connect and contribute to another individual positively
- To develop “documentary poetry” writing, editing, and revision skills

Each student was matched with a resident of Veteran's Village. They listened to and recorded their story. Back at school they transcribed the story and used it to create a “documentary poem.” Students listened to and followed the method of sociologist/writer/actor Anna Deveare Smith (*Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, *Notes From The Field*, *Let Me Down Easy*) who extensively interviews people and then edits their words into compelling monologues/plays. Students reviewed their transcribed interview and selected the most powerful parts to tell the veteran's story in a 60-70 line poem.



In art class, students created paintings that represented each veteran's story. Some included a particular good luck charm that the veteran held dear. Some were more visceral—depicting a particular place or battle. According to Jeremy, “The project became something much deeper than what I had set out to do. No longer could it be about creating a painting that matched the drapes and looked good over the sofa...They were dealing with stories that were deeply personal and emotionally complex.”



## EXHIBITION

The veterans were invited to an evening at the school where each student read their poem while their painting was displayed in the foreground. Behind the speaker, images from the day of the interviews were projected. Following the readings, students reconnected with the individuals they had honored and personally delivered their paintings. The documentary poems were compiled and published in a book for the Veteran's Village of San Diego.

As one student reflected, “I felt a connection I've never felt to a complete stranger before, because from ‘Hello, my name is...’ to the actual reading of the poems, it was no longer a class project. I felt it was almost like my duty to share her story.”



